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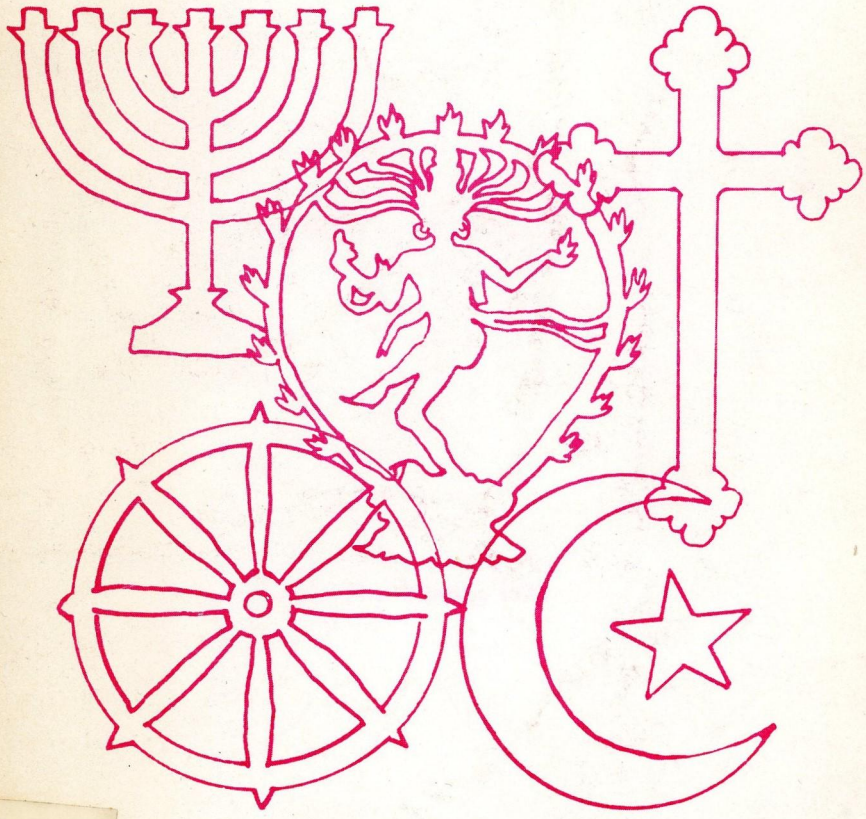
a study guide for

THE MYSTERY TEACHINGS IN WORLD RELIGIONS



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A Study Guide for the Quest Book

THE MYSTERY TEACHINGS IN THE WORLD RELIGIONS

by

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PREFACE

This is a study guide for The Mystery Teachings in World Religions. Its purpose is not to give a mass of facts and information but to help those interested in studying basic principles underlying world religions to delve deeper into the wellspring of the Ancient Wisdom. By tasting the water in several wells one comes to realize that there is one common underground reservoir supplying all the wells.

This guide may be used for individual or for group study. If used for group study, these suggestions might be helpful to your group: 1) One or two chapters may be covered at each meeting of the group. 2) The study will be most effective if all of the people in the group participate in the study and discussion. 3) To facilitate this, each member of the group should be invited to read the chapter which will be covered in the next meeting; refer to at least one of the references given; ponder the questions for consideration; and then take part in the discussion when the group meets. Where possible the questions for consideration should be specifically allocated. 4) The leader of the group should be responsible for asking the members of the group to take certain questions or to look up certain references for the next chapter to be discussed.

Most of the books listed as references are in print and may be purchased from the Theosophical Publishing House, P. O. Box 270, Wheaton, Illinois 60187. Books which are out of print, as well as books in print, may be borrowed by library members from the Olcott Library and Research Center at the National Center of the Theosophical Society in America. Out-of-print books may also be available at local theosophical libraries. References in print are designated by the letters TPH, indicating that they may be obtained through the Theosophical Publishing House and those which are out of print are designated by the letters OLRC, indicating that they may be obtained from the Olcott Library and Research Center.

The books listed as references by no means exhaust the available relevant titles. The subjects are dealt with in many other theosophical books, and students using this course may wish to consult other references to enrich their study.

Chapter 1

UNITY OF GOD

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

Hindu Concepts of Unity

1. Explain the meaning of the statement: "Sacredness is the essence of religion and does not depend upon religious organization."
2. What is the Hindu concept of duty?
3. What is the theme of the Bhagavad-Gita?

Buddhist Concepts of Unity

1. What is the keynote of the Buddha's teaching?
2. Explain the Buddhist attitude toward attachment.
3. Describe the process by which man's consciousness may ultimately attain fulfillment.

Chinese Concepts of Unity

1. What is the difference between the teachings of Master K'ung and MO-Tzu?
2. How do you interpret the statement: "The way to do . . . is to be"?
3. Describe Taoism in your own words.

Shintoism, Jainism, Sikhism

1. How does Shintoism differ from Buddhism?
2. Why do the Jains believe in harmlessness?
3. What is emphasized in the teachings of Sikhism?

Ancient Hermetic Concepts of Unity

1. Describe the essence of the teachings of Hermes Trismegistus?
2. What did the Hermetic Egyptians mean by magic?
3. How did the Hermetic Egyptians approach the concept of salvation?

Chapter 1 (continued)

Zoroastrian Concepts of Unity

1. What is the Zorastrian concept of the Divine?
2. Why is fire so significant to the Zoroastrians?
3. How is life "an instrument for cultivating spiritual relationships"?

Muslim, Sufis, Druses

1. What does "surrendering to the will of God" mean?
2. Why did the Sufis disguise their concepts in songs and poems?
3. How did the Druses believe man's spiritual purpose was hindered?

Dervish, Baha'i

1. Describe a Dervish.
2. Who are the "Lords of Souls"?
3. What is the duty of the individual according to the Baha'is?

Orphic and Platonic Concepts of Unity

1. What is a myth?
2. Does the ancient Greek view of myths differ from the modern view?
3. How was abstract thinking fostered during the Golden Age in Greece?

Pythagoras and Plato

1. What is the Monad?
2. Describe the Greek concept of harmony.
3. What was Plato's concept of unity?

Hebraic and Christian Concepts of Unity

1. Do you think the Bible was written as literal historical fact? Why?
2. Why would a book, such as the Bible, be written as an allegory in historical form?

Chapter 1 (continued)

3. How do "absurdities" (in the Bible) indicate hidden symbolic significances?

SUPPLEMENTARY READING

The Religions of Man, Houston Smith (Harper and Row, New York, 1964) TPH*

Secret Teachings of All Ages, Manly P. Hall (The Philosophical Research Society Press, Los Angeles, 1945) TPH

Seven Great Religions, Annie Besant (The Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Madras, India, 1966) TPH

The Sacred Writings of the World's Great Religions, S. E. Frost, Jr., Editor (McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1973 Paperback) TPH

Religion in the Twentieth Century, Vergilius Ferm, Editor (The Philosophical Library, New York, 1948) OLRC**

The Tree of Life, Ruth Smith, Editor (The Viking Press, New York, 1942) TPH

* Theosophical Publishing House
** Olcott Library and Research Center

Chapter II

THE TRINITY

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

The Hindu Trinity

1. What is the Hindu concept of Brahman? p 57
2. Why do you suppose the Divine Source manifests through a Trinity?
3. Describe the Hindu attitude concerning forms? p 58

The Buddhist Trinity

1. ". . . he (Buddha) decided that mere intellectual knowing could not cure the sorrows of men." What did he decide could cure the sorrows of men?
2. How would you answer the three questions of Gautama? p 60
3. Explain the Buddhist teaching concerning the nature of change. 61

The Egyptian Hermetic Trinity

1. Describe the Egyptian Hermetic concept of the Trinity. 62
2. How would you characterize the ancient Egyptian civilization? 62-63
3. Why was the solar disc chosen as the visible symbol of the Universal Force?

The Zoroastrian Trinity

1. What do the Zoroastrian teachings emphasize? 64
2. Explain the Second Person or Aspect of the Zoroastrian Trinity. 65
3. Describe Ahura Mazda.

The Orphic Greek Trinity

1. "Deity is not a being but a source of beings; not light but the source of light; not mind, but the source of mind; the hidden origin of all revealed things." What does this mean to you? 67
2. Do you agree with the Pythagorean teaching that everything in nature 67

Chapter II (continued)

is divisible into three parts? Why?

3. Why did the Greeks consider the triangle a sacred sign?

The Christian Trinity

1. What does Christianity say is the individual's responsibility?
2. What is the value of myths and folklore?
3. How has the distinction between "God and gods" affected Christianity?

SUPPLEMENTARY READING

Seven Great Religions, Annie Besant (The Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Madras, India, 1966) TPH

"Zarathushtra's Unique Spiritual Philosophy of Self-Unfoldment," Dastur Framroze A. Bode, (The American Theosophist, October 1971)

Sky Bent, Viva Emmons (New Voices Publishing Company, New York, 1955) OLRC

Psychology and Religion: West and East, C. G. Jung (Pantheon Books, New York, 1958) TPH

The Theosophical Seal, Arthur M. Coon (The Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Madras, India, 1958) TPH

Chapter III

GRADED SPIRITUAL INTELLIGENCES

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

Hindu Concepts of Graded Intelligences

1. Using your imagination describe a deva.
2. Why does Hinduism encourage worship of these greater or smaller levels of consciousness?
3. How is the aim in human evolution to perfect form and consciousness achieved?

Buddhist Concepts of Graded Intelligences

1. What happens as a Buddhist's ability and sensitivity increase?
2. Do new levels of awareness and consciousness give added responsibility to the individual? Why?
3. To what do Buddhists attribute the development of abilities and wisdom?

Egyptian Hermetic and Zoroastrian Concepts of Graded Intelligences

1. What do you consider to be the keynote of the Egyptian teachings?
2. Do you agree with the idea that "any evil or limitation only indicates lack of development"? Why?
3. What similarities are there between Egyptian and Persian teachings?

Greek Orphic Concepts of Graded Intelligences

1. What was the "river of vivification"?
2. Explain religion according to the Greek view.
3. Describe the "daimon."

Christian Concepts of Graded Intelligences

1. What is meant by "Sons of God"?

Chapter III (continued)

2. What is the Christian view of the significance of Jesus Christ?

3. Explain the concept of sacrifice as you understand it.

SUPPLEMENTARY READING

The Kingdom of the Gods, Geoffrey Hodson (The Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Madras, India, 1952) TPH

Lecture Notes, Vol. 2, Geoffrey Hodson (The Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Madras, India, 1955) OLRC

The Adepts, Manly P. Hall (The Philosophical Research Society, Los Angeles, CA 1952) OLRC

The Hidden Side of Things, Vol. 1, C. W. Leadbeater (The Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Madras, India, 1913) OLRC

Chapter IV

CHANGES IN EARTH AND THE UNSEEN WORLDS

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

Introduction

1. Why is one usually not aware of other states or levels of consciousness?
2. Why is it dangerous to use drugs and physical exercises to attain astral consciousness?
3. How would you distinguish between lower psychism and the higher faculties of spiritual vision?

Hindu and Buddhist Ideas of Changes in Earth and the Unseen Worlds

1. Explain in your own words the Hindu cosmology.
2. How does the Hindu concept of evolution differ from the Darwinian?
3. Why are catastrophies viewed as a means of progress?

Egyptian Ideas of Changes in Earth and the Unseen Worlds

1. How did the ancient Egyptians view the seen and the unseen worlds?
2. Explain the meaning behind the Solar Myth.
3. What did "after the pattern in the skies" signify to the Egyptians?

Zoroastrian Ideas of Changes in Earth and the Unseen Worlds

1. What is the Zoroastrian concept of time?
2. Describe a "celestial double."
3. What prevents man from finding peace?

Orphic and Greek Ideas of Changes in Earth and the Unseen Worlds

1. What is the basic pattern repeated throughout creation?

Chapter IV (continued)

2. Describe the relationship between body and spirit.

3. Explain the division between the interpenetrating planes of nature.

Hebraic Christian Ideas of Changes in Earth and in the Unseen Worlds

1. What do you think of the concept that selfish enmity, inharmony, impurity, and destructive thought forces are returned to humanity in the form of insects, plagues, diseases, and war?

2. Is the traditional concept of God undergoing a change today? In what way?

3. Why is much exploration in the physical sciences now focusing upon functioning relationships rather than emphasizing structure?

SUPPLEMENTARY READING

Self-Culture in the Light of Occultism, I. K. Taimni (The Theosophical Publishing House, Wheaton, IL, 1970) TPH Quest Book

"Energy Cycles of the Earth", Abraham H. Cort (Scientific American, Sept. 1970)

"The Evolutionary Cycles and their Chronology", Jean Raymond (The American Theosophist, May 1969)

"The Nights and Days of Brahma", Hugh Murdoch (The American Theosophist, May 1970)

The Earth and its Cycles, Elizabeth W. Preston (The Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Madras, India, 2nd Ed. 1954) OLRC

The Web of the Universe, E. L. Gardner (The Theosophical Publishing House, London, England, 1936) TPH

Man, The Measure of all Things, Sri Krishna Prem and Sri Madhava Ashish (The Theosophical Publishing House, Wheaton, IL, 1969) TPH

Chapter V

UNIVERSAL LAW

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

Introduction

1. Describe a universal law and give some examples.
2. What is your understanding of the author's statement: "We can most quickly attain growing awareness of the essential Oneness (call it identity with Deity, or discovering the Self, or by any other name) through compassion, sacrifice, and suffering."
3. Do you see modern conceptions of reality changing because of research in consciousness and psychical phenomena? How?

Hindu Concepts of Universal Law

1. What is the Vaivasvata Manu?
2. "The individual is taught that he must make the choice between the real and the unreal." What does this mean?
3. Describe the Hindu concept of an all-inclusive law of Justice.

Buddhist Concepts of Universal Law

1. If a man wishes to help the world what is his first task? Why?
2. Why does man suffer?
3. Discuss how one might tread "the middle way" in the world today.

Egyptian Hermetic Concepts of Universal Law

1. What was the basis of the science practiced by Egyptian priests?
2. Why was the Great Pyramid so significant to the Egyptians?
3. How did the initiation experience change the consciousness of the disciple?

Persian Zoroastrian Concepts of Universal Law

1. Why was purity so important to the Zoroastrian priest?

Chapter V (continued)

2. How did one become purified?

3. What enabled these early initiate priests to alter physical substance and even subtle substance?

Greek Orphic Concepts of Universal Law

1. Describe the Orphic concept of Universal law.

2. How did Pythagoras demonstrate the working of the Universal law?

3. What was the Greek view of the relationship between music and form?

Hebraic and Christian Concepts of Universal Law

1. What do you think is the meaning of "Christ in you, the hope of glory"?

2. How are modern scientific discoveries affecting traditional materialistic views of the universe?

3. According to the author what direction is Christianity heading in for the future? Do you agree? Why?

SUPPLEMENTARY READING

"The Pattern and the Law," Christmas Humphreys (The American Theosophist, May 1969)

This Ordered Universe, The Theosophical Research Center--London (The Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Madras, India, 1953) OLRC

The Ancient Wisdom, Annie Besant (The Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Madras, India, 1969) TPH

The Ageless Wisdom of Life, Clara Codd (The Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Madras, India, 1956) TPH Quest Book

The Ocean of Theosophy, William Q. Judge (The United Lodge of Theosophists, Los Angeles, CA, 1915) TPH

Space, Time, and Self, E. Norman Pearson (The Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Madras, India, 1957) TPH Quest Book

Chapter VI

CONTINUAL UNFOLDMENT OF CONSCIOUSNESS AND FORM

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

Introduction

1. What is consciousness?
2. What is "initiation"?

Hindu Buddhist Concepts of Unfolding Consciousness and Form

1. Why is an individual bound to the wheel of birth and death?
2. Describe the functions of the seven chakras in man.
3. How can one distinquish between a true Guru and a false one?

Egyptian Hermetic Concepts of Unfolding Consciousness and Form

1. Explain the meaning of the Osirian myth.
2. According to the Egyptian Mysteries what was the true nature of death?
3. When were those on probation considered ready to raise their consciousness?

Mithraic Concepts of Unfolding Consciousness and Form

1. What was the central idea of the Mithraic cult?

Greek Orphic Concepts of Unfolding Consciousness and Form

1. What was the theme of the Orphic Mysteries?
2. Describe the difference between the Lesser Mysteries and the Greater Mysteries.
3. Why did Plato regard the body as "the sepulchre of the soul"?

Christian Concepts of Unfolding Consciousness and Form

1. Why was the Christian Mystery tradition discarded?

Chapter VI (continued)

2. Who were the troubadours?

3. How do religious institutions become crystallized into rigid structures?

SUPPLEMENTARY READING

The Adepts, Manly P. Hall (The Philosophical Research Society, Los Angeles, CA, 1945) OLRC

Methods of Psychic Development, Irving S. Cooper, (The Theosophical Press, Wheaton, IL, 1946) TPH

Theosophy and the Western Mysteries, G. Nevin Drinkwater (The Theosophical Publishing House, London, England, 1944) OLRC

The Mysteries, E. L. Gardner (The Theosophical Publishing House, London, England, 1945) TPH

The Mystery Teachings and Christianity, Gerald Tranter (The Theosophical Publishing House, Wheaton, IL, 1969 Quest Book) TPH

The Astral Body, A. E. Powell (The Theosophical Publishing House, Wheaton, IL, 1973) TPH Quest Book

Chapter VII

TEACHERS GUIDE EVOLUTION

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

Levels of Consciousness, the Inner Teacher and Gautama Buddha

1. Describe from your own awareness the various levels of consciousness in man.
2. Describe the inner teacher.
3. What was the purpose of Gautama Buddha?

Jesus and Other Teachers throughout the Ages

1. What is a parable and why did Jesus use them?
2. What is a teacher?
3. Can science be considered a teacher? Why?

Man Assumes a New Role

1. Describe man's traditional role?
2. How is man's role changing?
3. What changes are needed in education today?

Conclusion

1. Summarize what you think are the key ideas expressed in this book.
2. Has this study changed or modified your concepts of or attitudes toward Theosophy? How?

SUPPLEMENTARY READING

Self-Culture in the Light of Occultism, I. K. Taimni (The Theosophical Publishing House, Wheaton, IL, 1970) TPH Quest Book

The Expansion of Awareness, Arthur W. Osburn (The Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Madras, India, 1961) TPH Quest Book

Chapter VII (continued)

Twelve World Teachers, Manly P. Hall (The Philosophers Press, Los Angeles, CA, 1937) TPH

Men Who Have Walked With God, Sheldon Cheney (Knopf, New York, NY, 1945) TPH

Gods in the Becoming, George Arundal (The Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Madras, India, 1936) TPH

The Perennial Philosophy, Aldous Huxley (Harper and Brothers, New York, NY, 1945) TPH